DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 096 SP 011 367

AUTHOR Hutslar, Jack
TITLE A Democratic Approach to Creative Playgrounds.
PUB DATE 12 May 76
NOTE 33p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Role; Construction (Process); *Cooperative Planning; *Democratic Values; Facility Planning; Facility Utilization Research; Maintenance; Participant Involvement; Participant Satisfaction; *Playgrounds

ABSTRACT

Playground development resulting in self-direction, independence, and creativity among children over time can result from a democratic process of planning, construction, and maintenance. Practical experience has shown that using a "democratic committee approach" to playground care, in which school children are responsible for various need areas (e.g., equipment, inspection, ground care, equipment storage), has successfully kept playgrounds active and alive after initial novelty has faded. Participatory planning by children also results in a more effective facility; disuse, nonuse, misuse, and abuse are all reduced when children become full-functioning partners with adults in the development and ongoing maintenance of a creative play area. When working with children, adults should expect mistakes, slowness, inefficiency, diversions from the task at hand, and lack of knowledge, but in a democratic-participatory-committee approach, children will seek guidance, adults will learn, and the project will promote long-continuing involvement after the initial development stages. (MJB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED150096

A DEMOCRATIC APPROACH TO CREATIVE PLAYGROUNDS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Jack Hutslar

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND THE ERIC SYSTEM CONTRACTORS."

Submitted by

Jack Hutslar, Ph. D.

Assistant Professor

Health and Physical Education

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

May 12, 1976

SP011 367

209 Maclellan Gymnasium
Department of Health and
Physical Education
University of Tennessee at
Chattanooga
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37401
May 13, 1976

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Brown
PTA Playground Committee
1208 Hanover Street
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37405

Dear Wilda and Frank:

I have spent the last six days here at Ohio State speaking with people, reading books about playgrounds, and composing this letter. In this letter I will synthesize the material I have found into a meaningful relationship for me but perhaps one which is inadequate for you. I would suggest that you either read this letter once and disregard it, or read it several times, as necessary, to understand clearly what I am advocating for your PTA Playground Committee.

First let me tell you there were more resources here than I can possibly relate to you in one letter, however, we (you) are on the right track with the desire for a creative playground. Our concerns about maintenance are well-founded as is an additional area of concern--injury and liability.

The creative playground represents a viable concept, but the latest trend, according to Fred Patterson the recreation specialist at Ohio State, is the National Parks and Recreation Association's recommendation for multi-range and multi-purpose playgrounds using: (a) fixed-equipment and fixed-purpose

equipment that you already have on the playground; (b) creative equipment that you plan to build; (c) non-designated, open areas for numerous, unspecified activities of a game and sport nature; and (d) adventure playgrounds which you referred to as "junk yards." The latter play area is the most creative; uses essentially hammer, nail, wood, brick and water in combination, and needs supervision. It is a nice concept but I do not think you have the desire for it (for aesthetic reasons) or the ability to staff (supervise) such an effort on a full or part time basis. However, the city recreation department might give it consideration.

I did find one concept from the adventure playground that may be of interest to your committee. As I am sure you are aware, there are routine day-to-day clean up and maintenance problems on the adventure playground, and we anticipated some of these problems on our creative playground. In order to avoid playground deterioration through use, disuse, misuse and abuse, you could utilize a "democratic committee approach" to playground care using the children from the school as committee members representing and responsible for the various need areas (i.e.: equipment inspection; ground care; equipment moving; equipment storage; summer inspection; routine inspection; et cetera). I will not attempt to explain or define all the need areas for I am sure your efforts will be more satisfactory, particularly if the children are involved in the project from the beginning.

I will now outline a process which has successfully kept other playgrounds alive and active over time.

Using basically a democratic approach, I would urge you to involve the children of the school in the planning, design, construction, evaluation and maintenance of the playground. This might be called "participatory planning by children." Now, I realize this is asking a lot and probably more than you want to do, but IF you want to build this playground for the children with the best possible results, I think this should be your minimum effort.

One of the standard complaints about playgrounds is disuse after the novelty wears off. I do not think we can expect children to love and cherish a playground they have no voice in selecting. However, let us not dwell on the problems of playgrounds and disinterested children. Let us just remember that people (some of whom are children) tend to take an interest in those affairs in which they have a voice, input and concerns (i.e.: playgrounds).

Two points come to mind. First, children will need to have a long-range interest in this playground or it will fall into some stage of disuse; and parents and teachers, of necessity, will need to take a continued interest in the playground. This can be done through the democratic development of the children with participatory planning. The need for continued adult interest is important. Even at the college level I have seen well-supported programs fall to the wayside because students wanted to run them. The students were given control. But when those particular students were graduated, their interest in self-governance and these programs also left. As a result programs died because there was no continuity from one year to the next. So, we are talking about an

on-going process with the playground as much as we are talking about posts, holes and tires.

Second, and as important, is that in the process of planning, designing, construction, evaluating, and maintaining the playground, the adults must remember that children are equal participants in the development and maintenance of this playground, but the children are children. The children will learn as much about their parents, their school, and their playground as they will about play and the democratic process. Also, since they are children, they will be subject to numerous errors in judgment (which should probably be overlooked in most instances). More importantly, the children will also assume a very active role in the project if permitted, and an equally passive role in the entire process if adults dominate the project. This latter occurrance may defeat the purpose of the project (play by children over the years) if this is permitted to happen. Obviously children in kindergarten through third grade cannot compete with adult emotions and reasoning, but the children are capable of tremendous input and responsibility if permitted to participate. I am confident you (parents and teachers) will see unexpected growth and creativity from the children if the children are given the opportunity to participate equally with the adults.

Again, let me remind you, the playground project can be done quite easily by a band of "charged-up" parents over the summer, but perhaps we should not be too surprised that, if the project is carried out in this fashion, the area becomes an "eye-sore" in a few years when the adult involvement and leadership diminishes.

What I am proposing for us is a modification of what worked well for Jack Lambert on his Adventure Playgrounds.[1] He formed committees of children to supervise the play area with a minimum of adult input and direction, but with the type of direction provided by the Montessori method (accessible sequenced material available) as described by Herkowitz and Kieffer.[2] Several quotes from Lambert may best summarize his approach to play and adventure playgrounds.

> As the play leader at Endrup, the first Danish adventure playground put it, the children are sovereign and the initiative must come from them. The leader can make suggestions but must never demand. He must obtain the tools and material needed or requested by the children but must at any time be prepared to give way to new activities. To organize and arrange programmes is to stifle imagination and initiative and preclude children whose lively curiosity and interests constantly demand new outlets.[3] /emphasis removed by this writer/

Later he made the comment which would perhaps be most relevant to the maintenance and upkeep stage of the playground project.

> One of the great paradoxes in the art of playing with children is that you know you are doing well when you are doing nothing. Doing nothing is one of the hardest things of all.[4]

He was also strongly aware of the ordered life children lead and made the following statement: "By the time I got to Welwyn /a playground/ in 1967 I was fully committed to adventure playgrounds and their role in our overdeveloped environment."[5]

---

[1]Jack Lambert as told to Jenny Pearson, Adventure Playgrounds, London: Jonathan Cape, 1974.

[2]Jacqueline Herkowitz and Leigh F. Kieffer, "Structuring The Movement Environment For Preschool Children," Quest XXIV (Summer, 1975), pp. 72-79.

[3]Lambert, op. cit., p. 18. [4]Ibid, p. 65.

[5]Ibid, p. 77.

I would like to point out that when working with the children you should learn to expect mistakes, slowness, inefficiency, diversions from the task at hand, and lack of knowledge. But as others have said before, "Play is the work of children." We can think of numerous things children MAY learn from play, but in the end play is probably purposeless and done in-and-of-itself. Therefore, while you are working to build a playground, the children may be playing. You have to realize this and permit it to happen. The process of making a playground, therefore, becomes as important as the product upon completion. The process is adults learning about children; and children learning about play (which may be a major concept to be realized by the children and particularly the adults as the product emerges), playgrounds, use of tools, adulthood, and democratic action. The process of democratic action then becomes the means by which the playground continues to be an alive, active and wonderful place for children to play and have fun. The process does not stop with one summer then, but continues as a way of life.

Some might argue that I am more concerned about the democratic process in developing the playground than I am about play. However, I do not think these two concerns are in conflict or disproportionate, necessarily. In fact, I am basing the entire approach for bringing this playground to reality on the hypothesis that the democratic process will actually foster long-term play by the children of the school. I believe that certain actions will interfere with play only when an authoritarian or dictatorial leadership pattern detracts from the input which the children can provide.

Generally, I think the approach by the adults toward this project could be quite dogmatic and authoritarian, but in the end the children may be no more than robots completing the task. As you know, most of us have been raised in highly authoritarian environments under rather strict controls and sanctions. As a consequence, I fear that most of us will know best how to "boss" and "order," and that may be exactly what some may feel is needed to get the job done quickly. No doubt leadership is needed, but it should not be arbitrary and based on one or two peoples' desire to complete the task quickly. Those people would be better doing some other task, perhaps not directly connected with the children.

I should emphasize here that democratic leadership and participation does not mean no leadership. It means everyone has input in decisions, and rule is (if that is a proper word to use) by majority action. The difficulty we all have in operating within a democratic framework is understandable. We have always been told what to do and punished if we did not do it. We do not know how to function in a democratic manner, and we do not know the essentials of a democratic system. Learning to operate in a democratic fashion will provide an interesting challenge to those who will accept your task.

I would emphasize again, the democratic process does not mean nor is it synonymous with no leadership. It means everyone has input in decision making. In your case the majority will be children, and some people will feel awkward or threatened if the children are given too much input in the process. These children

will have crude skills, immature attitudes and emotions by adult standards, but the ability to ask for guidance and direction when needed. This latter point could be another cornerstone for the democratic-participatory-committee approach to the creative playground concept--the children will seek guidance and direction when they need help. However, it does not mean they should be left to struggle, wander and err, nor does it mean they should be lead through every step of the project.

I differ from others in that I will give direction to children when I see their efforts will lead nowhere or to trouble. The mode of my guidance might be suggestive, however, rather than demanding (e.g.: "Have you tried it this way?" rather than "Do it like this!"). This approach probably eminates from my background in movement education for elementary school children. We also know from research in group dynamics that demands and demanding tend to produce aversion and avoidance, particularly when the freedom to leave the scene or dissent is available. We also know that control does not foster creativity (as in problem solving groups), and this is one of the key reasons we wanted to build this type of playground rather than the "push and pull" play area with fixed-purpose equipment.

By and large I have set down some guidelines to show you how to conduct the project. It will work but it will not be rapidly done and forgotten, nor should it be. The adults will want to see results in material gain on the playground, but what should be gained are extremely satisfied children, and most probably some

very surprised and changed adults. The adults who will see this most clearly will be those who are sorry when their role in the project is terminated.

Now, so you will have something tangible, let me offer you some concrete suggestio ns taken from the material I have read.

(1) I have found no material on the placement of items on the playground--the spatial relationship of parts or pieces. So, the best approach I can offer you is that of Lederman and Trachsel who say to arrange the pieces of equipment in what seems to be a safe design. They advocate safety and logic.[6]

(2) The type of equipment you can use is unlimited, or I should say is limited only to your own ideas. Your own creativity may be taxed if you think other items are necessary. You can, however, solve some of these problems if you will allow children to select or "dream-up" equipment to be constructed or placed on the area in their art, physical education and English classes.[7]

---

[6] Alfred Lederman and Alfred Trachsel, Creative Playgrounds and Recreation Centers, Revised edition, New York: Praeger, 1968, pp. 9-10.: You may also be able to visit a model physical education program in Ocilla, Georgia (zip code 31774; telephone 912 468-7098) under the direction of Martha Owens and Susan Rockett. They have a nationally famous program which includes playgrounds of the type for which we have concerns. An article about their program was printed in "Every Child A Winner," Journal of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, XXXXV (October, 1974), pp. 14-16.

[7] After completing this letter to you, it was disclosed to me by Jan Olson, a faculty member on leave from the University of New Mexico, that a similar model had been followed successfully (participatory planning by children) at the Monte Vista Elementary School in Albuquerque, New Mixico. The project was under the direction of Dr. Richard Nordhaus (Architecture) and Dr. Ann Taylor (Art) for the University of New Mexico (Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131). A portion of their plan was for children at the school to draw pictures in art class and write essays in English class about what they wanted to be included on their playground.

(3) Dr. Leroy Fanning can be of great help to you with the basic movement skills of children. Herkowitz and Kieffer have suggested that certain motor patterns need development because ". . . running, throwing, striking, jumping, catching, climbing, and kicking skills are prerequisite to the development of specialized sport and dance skills, . . ."[8] They went on to suggest a need for equipment on preschool playgrounds to ". . . climb, hang, swing, balance, roll objects, roll oneself, strike, catch, throw, zip, lace, button, cut, lock, latch, snap, buckle, stack, fit, and push and pull objects."[9] From the Adventure Playground you may want to consider space to dig, build, cook, wash, sail, pound, mix, burn, and cycle. More inactive forms of play may also be separately or integrally located on the proposed site.

(4) I should also caution you that this type of creative playground has been considered an "attractive nuisance" by the courts according to Joe Hewlett, former Ohio State gymnastic coach and playground advocate. You may want to inquire into the Board of Education's position on resultant injuries and liability in this regard before you progress further.

(5) It is interesting to note that vandalism has been reduced with student input in the planning-to-maintenance stages. Local vandalism (opposed to outsiders who come into the neighborhood)

---

[8]Herkowitz and Kieffer, op. cit., p. 72.

[9]Ibid, p. 76.

has been reduced both by Lambert and in Albuquerque when the democratic approach was used to create involvement.

(6) The invention and creativity we spoke about will be greater on the creative playground than on the "push-pull" playgrounds, but less than on the "junk yards" or adventure playgrounds. The non-fixed-purpose or creative area will also have greater aesthetic quality than the adventure playground, if that is an important consideration in your decision. However, fantasy and creativity should be kept well in mind as the playground is designed. The more you can ascribe a purpose or function to the equipment, the more you reduce the creative potential of the area.

(7) Management, maintenance, and supervision can be handled via this same participatory committee process previously mentioned. Repeating, however, the expectations held for the childrens' performance should not be based on adult standards. The children will need continual support and supervision: Adults should not walk away.

(8) The care of movable and portable equipment can also be managed via committee. We spoke of the problems with spools, logs, railroad ties and other equipment easily stolen. The summer months provide other problems in supervision of portable equipment, and again student supervision may resolve some of these problems.

(9) Jack Lambert noted several points about playground construction I will summarize and pass along for your consideration. Take what you need from the list and disregard the rest. They are presented to give you ideas rather than to prescribe courses of action.

1 Marshall your forces including political support.
2 Get organized /hopefully in a democratic fashion/.
3 Select the site: He recommends one acre per 300 students.
4 Raise money needed by aid programs, charity, or fund drive.
5 Determine the costs.
6 Determine the insurance problems.
7 Prepare the site: clearing, leveling, et cetera.
8 Determine the water needs: swim, wash, wade, splash, sail, and drink.
9 Determine lavatory needs.
10 Fixed equipment needs.
11 Movable equipment and material needs
12 Sources of materials include: contractors, post offices, railroads, and merchants to name a few.
13 Staff needs including full-time and part-time supervision by people such as students, parents, teachers and other citizens.[10]

(10) I will also include some material from Lederman and Trachsel, Creative Playgrounds and Recreation Centers. They presented ten points of playground design which I will shorten and paraphrase.

1 Each playground must be designed and equipped for one function--PLAY.
2 The people who plan the area (architects, landscape designers, teachers) must work together and cooperate, again with the child and play the decisive factor in design and decision.
3 The playground is for active, spontaneous and creative play not passive entertainment as in fixed-equipment areas.
4 Components and materials for play are preferred to mechanical equipment characterized as inflexible contraptions.
5 Playground design and equipment should conform to the age group and play for whom the area is designed.
6 Variety in play is encouraged by not "designing-in" certain functions.
7 Plan the area with the movements and functions of the games and parts considered. In other words, do not put sand play areas under climbing objects or near ball areas.

---

[10] Jack Lambert as told to Jenny Pearson, Adventure Playgrounds, London: Jonathan Cape, 1974, p. 164.

8 "Design-in" fantasy or play areas. This should bring to mind areas with no set purpose or function.
9 Play when designing and planning the playground.
10 Seek broad cooperation in the project with the realization that families may be brought together on the area. The project itself becomes a source of cohesion.[11]

(11) Lederman and Trachsel went on to mention other equipment considerations such as: sand; water for swim, drink and play; hard surface for street games; non-directive areas for free play; equipment for climbing and action games; climbing towers; tunnels for crawling and climbing; rope and tubular swings; slides; stumps and stools for leap frog and balance; play /house/ partitions and walls; and old discarded vehicles.[12]

(12) The pile of dirt which seemed to foster that disturbing "King of the Hill" game seems to be doomed in your plans. I would like to see that hill remain, possibly with large sewer-tile tunnels added. The mound of dirt opens a Pandora's box for child fantasy. I would suggest that rough-house uses of the hill may subside when other playground features are available and the hill is no longer the only creative space on the grounds.

(13) I will include one last bit of information from Joe Hewlett. He has worked with children and playgrounds for years, and has suggested several points you can PLAY WITH to resolve problems.

---

[11]Alfred Lederman and Alfred Trachsel, Creative Playgrounds and Recreation Centers Revised edition, New York: Praeger, 1968, pp. 9-10, 15.

[12]Ibid, pp. 10-12.

1 Invent what you like, need or want.
2 Observe what the children do and improvise
3 Make management, supervision and maintenance child-centered and child-directed.
4 Resolve the injury and liability problems early.
5 Modify any concept to fit your needs.
6 Let the children handle the movable and portable equipment.
7 Plan your course of action.

What I see within this project is the progressive opportunity to develop self-direction, independence, and creativity among the children. Ultimately we all would hope this returns full-circle to where you people are now. That is, interdependence and the desire and willingness to help others. Whatever we decide to do and however we plan to carry it through. we must always return to one cornerstone--PLAY. No matter our approach, we must always use as our yardstick (1) the play of children in kindergarten through third grade, and (2) we want the play to continue over time rather than terminate when the newness or novelty of the setting wears off.

I hope you and the PTA committee will accept the challenge I present to you in this letter.

Sincerely,

Jack Hutslar

Jack Hutslar, Ph. D.
Assistant Professor

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Herkowitz, Jacqueline and Leigh F. Kieffer. "Structuring the Movement Environment for Preschool Children." Quest, XXIV (Summer, 1975), 72-79.

Lambert, Jack as told to Jenny Pearson. Adventure Playgrounds. London: Jonathan Cape, 1974.

Lederman, Alfred and Alfred Trachsel. Creative Playgrounds and Recreation Centers. Revised edition. New York: Praeger, 1968.

A DEMOCRATIC APPROACH TO CREATIVE PLAYGROUNDS

Submitted by

Jack Hutslar, Ph. D.

Assistant Professor

Health and Physical Education

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

May 12, 1976

209 Maclellan Gymnasium
Department of Health and
Physical Education
University of Tennessee at
Chattanooga
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37401
May 13, 1976

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Brown
PTA Playground Committee
1208 Hanover Street
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37405

Dear Wilda and Frank:

I have spent the last six days here at Ohio State speaking with people, reading books about playgrounds, and composing this letter. In this letter I will synthesize the material I have found into a meaningful relationship <u>for me</u> but perhaps one which is inadequate for you. I would suggest that you either read this letter once and disregard it, or read it several times, as necessary, to understand <u>clearly</u> what I am advocating for your PTA Playground Committee.

First let me tell you there were more resources here than I can possibly relate to you in one letter, however, we (you) are on the right track with the desire for a creative playground. Our concerns about maintenance are well-founded as is an additional area of concern--injury and liability.

The creative playground represents a viable concept, but the latest trend, according to Fred Patterson the recreation specialist at Ohio State, is the National Parks and Recreation Association's recommendation for multi-range and multi-purpose playgrounds using: (a) fixed-equipment and fixed-purpose

equipment that you already have on the playground; (b) creative equipment that you plan to build; (c) non-designated, open areas for numerous, unspecified activities of a game and sport nature; and (d) adventure playgrounds which you referred to as "junk yards." The latter play area is the most creative; uses essentially hammer, nail, wood, brick and water in combination, and needs supervision. It is a nice concept but I do not think you have the desire for it (for aesthetic reasons) or the ability to staff (supervise) such an effort on a full or part time basis. However, the city recreation department might give it consideration.

I did find one concept from the adventure playground that may be of interest to your committee. As I am sure you are aware, there are routine day-to-day clean up and maintenance problems on the adventure playground, and we anticipated some of these problems on our creative playground. In order to avoid playground deterioration through use, disuse, misuse and abuse, you could utilize a "democratic committee approach" to playground care using the children from the school as committee members representing and responsible for the various need areas (i.e.: equipment inspection; ground care; equipment moving; equipment storage; summer inspection; routine inspection; et cetera). I will not attempt to explain or define all the need areas for I am sure your efforts will be more satisfactory, particularly if the children are involved in the project from the beginning.

I will now outline a process which has successfully kept other playgrounds alive and active over time.

Using basically a democratic approach, I would urge you to involve the children of the school in the planning, design, construction, evaluation and maintenance of the playground. This might be called "participatory planning by children." Now, I realize this is asking a lot and probably more than you want to do, but IF you want to build this playground for the children with the best possible results, I think this should be your minimum effort.

One of the standard complaints about playgrounds is disuse after the novelty wears off. I do not think we can expect children to love and cherish a playground they have no voice in selecting. However, let us not dwell on the problems of playgrounds and disinterested children. Let us just remember that people (some of whom are children) tend to take an interest in those affairs in which they have a voice, input and concerns (i.e.: playgrounds).

Two points come to mind. First, children will need to have a long-range interest in this playground or it will fall into some stage of disuse; and parents and teachers, of necessity, will need to take a continued interest in the playground. This can be done through the democratic development of the children with participatory planning. The need for continued adult interest is important. Even at the college level I have seen well-supported programs fall to the wayside because students wanted to run them. The students were given control. But when those particular students were graduated, their interest in self-governance and these programs also left. As a result programs died because there was no continuity from one year to the next. So, we are talking about an

on-going process with the playground as much as we are talking about posts, holes and tires.

Second, and as important, is that in the process of planning, designing, construction, evaluating, and maintaining the playground, the adults must remember that children are equal participants in the development and maintenance of this playground, but the children are children. The children will learn as much about their parents, their school, and their playground as they will about play and the democratic process. Also, since they are children, they will be subject to numerous errors in judgment (which should probably be overlooked in most instances). More importantly, the children will also assume a very active role in the project if permitted, and an equally passive role in the entire process if adults dominate the project. This latter occurrance may defeat the purpose of the project (play by children over the years) if this is permitted to happen. Obviously children in kindergarten through third grade cannot compete with adult emotions and reasoning, but the children are capable of tremendous input and responsibility if permitted to participate. I am confident you (parents and teachers) will see unexpected growth and creativity from the children if the children are given the opportunity to participate equally with the adults.

Again, let me remind you, the playground project can be done quite easily by a band of "charged-up" parents over the summer, but perhaps we should not be too surprised that, if the project is carried out in this fashion, the area becomes an "eye-sore" in a few years when the adult involvement and leadership diminishes.

What I am proposing for us is a modification of what worked well for Jack Lambert on his Adventure Playgrounds.[1] He formed committees of children to supervise the play area with a minimum of adult input and direction, but with the type of direction provided by the Montessori method (accessible sequenced material available) as described by Herkowitz and Kieffer.[2] Several quotes from Lambert may best summarize his approach to play and adventure playgrounds.

> As the play leader at Emdrup, the first Danish adventure playground put it, the children are sovereign and the initiative must come from them. The leader can make suggestions but must never demand. He must obtain the tools and material needed or requested by the children but must at any time be prepared to give way to new activities. To organize and arrange programmes is to stifle imagination and initiative and preclude children whose lively curiosity and interests constantly demand new outlets.[3] [emphasis removed by this writer]

Later he made the comment which would perhaps be most relevant to the maintenance and upkeep stage of the playground project.

> One of the great paradoxes in the art of playing with children is that you know you are doing well when you are doing nothing. Doing nothing is one of the hardest things of all.[4]

He was also strongly aware of the ordered life children lead and made the following statement: "By the time I got to Welwyn [a playground] in 1967 I was fully committed to adventure playgrounds and their role in our overdeveloped environment."[5]

---

[1]Jack Lambert as told to Jenny Pearson, Adventure Playgrounds, London: Jonathan Cape, 1974.

[2]Jacqueline Herkowitz and Leigh F. Kieffer, "Structuring The Movement Environment For Preschool Children," Quest XXIV (Summer, 1975), pp. 72-79.

[3]Lambert, op. cit., p. 18. [4]Ibid, p. 65.

[5]Ibid, p. 77.

I would like to point out that when working with the children you should learn to expect mistakes, slowness, inefficiency, diversions from the task at hand, and lack of knowledge. But as others have said before: "Play is the work of children." We can think of numerous things children MAY learn from play, but in the end play is probably purposeless and done in-and-of-itself. Therefore, while you are working to build a playground, the children may be playing. You have to realize this and permit it to happen. The process of making a playground, therefore, becomes as important as the product upon completion. The process is adults learning about children; and children learning about play (which may be a major concept to be realized by the children and particularly the adults as the product emerges), playgrounds, use of tools, adulthood, and democratic action. The process of democratic action then becomes the means by which the playground continues to be an alive, active and wonderful place for children to play and have fun. The process does not stop with one summer then, but continues as a way of life.

Some might argue that I am more concerned about the democratic process in developing the playground than I am about play. However, I do not think these two concerns are in conflict or disproportionate, necessarily. In fact, I am basing the entire approach for bringing this playground to reality on the hypothesis that the democratic process will actually foster long-term play by the children of the school. I believe that certain actions will interfere with play only when an authoritarian or dictatorial leadership pattern detracts from the input which the children can provide.

Generally, I think the approach by the adults toward this project could be quite dogmatic and authoritarian, but in the end the children may be no more than robots completing the task. As you know, most of us have been raised in highly authoritarian environments under rather strict controls and sanctions. As a consequence, I fear that most of us will know best how to "boss" and "order," and that may be exactly what some may feel is needed to get the job done quickly. No doubt leadership is needed, but it should not be arbitrary and based on one or two peoples' desire to complete the task quickly. Those people would be better doing some other task, perhaps not directly connected with the children.

I should emphasize here that democratic leadership and participation does not mean no leadership. It means everyone has input in decisions, and rule is (if that is a proper word to use) by majority action. The difficulty we all have in operating within a democratic framework is understandable. We have always been told what to do and punished if we did not do it. We do not know how to function in a democratic manner, and we do not know the essentials of a democratic system. Learning to operate in a democratic fashion will provide an interesting challenge to those who will accept your task.

I would emphasize again, the democratic process does not mean nor is it synonymous with no leadership. It means everyone has input in decision making. In your case the majority will be children, and some people will feel awkward or threatened if the children are given too much input in the process. These children

will have crude skills, immature attitudes and emotions by adult standards, but the ability to ask for guidance and direction when needed. This latter point could be another cornerstone for the democratic-participatory-committee approach to the creative playground concept--the children will seek guidance and direction when they need help. However, it does not mean they should be left to struggle, wander and err, nor does it mean they should be lead through every step of the project.

I differ from others in that I will give direction to children when I see their efforts will lead nowhere or to trouble. The mode of my guidance might be suggestive, however, rather than demanding (e.g.: "Have you tried it this way?" rather than "Do it like this!"). This approach probably eminates from my background in movement education for elementary school children. We also know from research in group dynamics that demands and demanding tend to produce aversion and avoidance, particularly when the freedom to leave the scene or dissent is available. We also know that control does not foster creativity (as in problem solving groups), and this is one of the key reasons we wanted to build this type of playground rather than the "push and pull" play area with fixed-purpose equipment.

By and large I have set down some guidelines to show you how to conduct the project. It will work but it will not be rapidly done and forgotten, nor should it be. The adults will want to see results in material gain on the playground, but what should be gained are extremely satisfied children, and most probably some

very surprised and changed adults. The adults who will see this most clearly will be those who are sorry when their role in the project is terminated.

Now, so you will have something tangible, let me offer you some concrete suggestions taken from the material I have read.

(1) I have found no material on the placement of items on the playground--the spatial relationship of parts or pieces. So, the best approach I can offer you is that of Lederman and Trachsel who say to arrange the pieces of equipment in what seems to be a safe design. They advocate safety and logic.[6]

(2) The type of equipment you can use is unlimited, or I should say is limited only to your own ideas. Your own creativity may be taxed if you think other items are necessary. You can, however, solve some of these problems if you will allow children to select or "dream-up" equipment to be constructed or placed on the area in their art, physical education and English classes.[7]

---

[6]Alfred Lederman and Alfred Trachsel, Creative Playgrounds and Recreation Centers, Revised edition, New York: Praeger, 1968, pp. 9-10.: You may also be able to visit a model physical education program in Ocilla, Georgia (zip code 31774; telephone 912 468-7098) under the direction of Martha Owens and Susan Rockett. They have a nationally famous program which includes playgrounds of the type for which we have concerns. An article about their program was printed in "Every Child A Winner," Journal of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, XXXXV (October, 1974), pp. 14-16.

[7]After completing this letter to you, it was disclosed to me by Jan Olson, a faculty member on leave from the University of New Mexico, that a similar model had been followed successfully (participatory planning by children) at the Monte Vista Elementary School in Albuquerque, New Mixico. The project was under the direction of Dr. Richard Nordhaus (Architecture) and Dr. Ann Taylor (Art) for the University of New Mexico (Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131). A portion of their plan was for children at the school to draw pictures in art class and write essays in English class about what they wanted to be included on their playground.

(3) Dr. Leroy Fanning can be of great help to you with the basic movement skills of children. Herkowitz and Kieffer have suggested that certain motor patterns need development because ". . . running, throwing, striking, jumping, catching, climbing, and kicking skills are prerequisite to the development of specialized sport and dance skills, . . ."[8] They went on to suggest a need for equipment on preschool playgrounds to ". . . climb, hang, swing, balance, roll objects, roll oneself, strike, catch, throw, zip, lace, button, cut, lock, latch, snap, buckle, stack, fit, and push and pull objects."[9] From the Adventure Playground you may want to consider space to dig, build, cook, wash, sail, pound, mix, burn, and cycle. More inactive forms of play may also be separately or integrally located on the proposed site.

(4) I should also caution you that this type of creative playground has been considered an "attractive nuisance" by the courts according to Joe Hewlett, former Ohio State gymnastic coach and playground advocate. You may want to inquire into the Board of Education's position on resultant injuries and liability in this regard before you progress further.

(5) It is interesting to note that vandalism has been reduced with student input in the planning-to-maintenance stages. Local vandalism (opposed to outsiders who come into the neighborhood)

---

[8] Herkowitz and Kieffer, op. cit., p. 72.

[9] Ibid, p. 76.

has been reduced both by Lambert and in Albuquerque when the democratic approach was used to create involvement.

(6) The invention and creativity we spoke about will be greater on the creative playground than on the "push-pull" playgrounds, but less than on the "junk yards" or adventure playgrounds. The non -fixed-purpose or creative area will also have greater aesthetic quality than the adventure playground, if that is an important consideration in your decision. However, fantasy and creativity should be kept well in mind as the playground is designed. The more you can ascribe a purpose or function to the equipment, the more you reduce the creative potential of the area.

(7) Management, maintenance, and supervision can be handled via this same participatory committee process previously mentioned. Repeating, however, the expectations held for the childrens' performance should not be based on adult standards. The children will need continual support and supervision: Adults should not walk away.

(8) The care of movable and portable equipment can also be managed via committee. We spoke of the problems with spools, logs, railroad ties and other equipment easily stolen. The summer months provide other problems in supervision of portable equipment, and again student supervision may resolve some of these problems.

(9) Jack Lambert noted several points about playground construction I will summarize and pass along for your consideration. Take what you need from the list and disregard the rest. They are presented to give you ideas rather than to prescribe courses of action.

1 Marshall your forces including political support.
2 Get organized /hopefully in a democratic fashion/.
3 Select the site: He recommends one acre per 300 students.
4 Raise money needed by aid programs, charity, or fund drive.
5 Determine the costs.
6 Determine the insurance problems.
7 Prepare the site: clearing, leveling, et cetera.
8 Determine the water needs: swim, wash, wade, splash, sail, and drink.
9 Determine lavatory needs.
10 Fixed equipment needs.
11 Movable equipment and material needs
12 Sources of materials include: contractors, post offices, railroads, and merchants to name a few.
13 Staff needs including full-time and part-time supervision by people such as students, parents, teachers and other citizens.[10]

(10) I will also include some material from Lederman and Trachsel, Creative Playgrounds and Recreation Centers. They presented ten points of playground design which I will shorten and paraphrase.

1 Each playground must be designed and equipped for one function--PLAY.
2 The people who plan the area (architects, landscape designers, teachers) must work together and cooperate, again with the child and play the decisive factor in design and decision.
3 The playground is for active, spontaneous and creative play not passive entertainment as in fixed-equipment areas.
4 Components and materials for play are preferred to mechanical equipment characterized as inflexible contraptions.
5 Playground design and equipment should conform to the age group and play for whom the area is designed.
6 Variety in play is encouraged by not "designing-in" certain functions.
7 Plan the area with the movements and functions of the games and parts considered. In other words, do not put sand play areas under climbing objects or near ball areas.

---

[10] Jack Lambert as told to Jenny Pearson, Adventure Playgrounds, London: Jonathan Cape, 1974, p. 164.

8 "Design-in" fantasy or play areas. This should bring to mind areas with no set purpose or function.
9 Play when designing and planning the playground.
10 Seek broad cooperation in the project with the realization that families may be brought together on the area. The project itself becomes a source of cohesion.[11]

(11) Lederman and Trachsel went on to mention other equipment considerations such as: sand; water for swim, drink and play; hard surface for street games; non-directive areas for free play; equipment for climbing and action games; climbing towers; tunnels for crawling and climbing; rope and tubular swings; slides; stumps and stools for leap frog and balance; play /house/ partitions and walls; and old discarded vehicles.[12]

(12) The pile of dirt which seemed to foster that disturbing "King of the Hill" game seems to be doomed in your eyes. I would like to see that hill remain, possibly with large sewer-tile tunnels added. The mound of dirt opens a Pandora's box for child fantasy. I would suggest that rough-house uses of the hill may subside when other playground features are available and the hill is no longer the only creative space on the grounds.

(13) I will include one last bit of information from Joe Hewlett. He has worked with children and playgrounds for years, and has suggested several points you can PLAY WITH to resolve problems.

---

[11]Alfred Lederman and Alfred Trachsel, Creative Playgrounds and Recreation Centers Revised edition, New York: Praeger, 1963, pp. 9-10, 15.

[12]Ibid, pp. 10-12.

1 Invent what you like, need or want.
2 Observe what the children do and improvise
3 Make management, supervision and maintenance child-centered and child-directed.
4 Resolve the injury and liability problems early.
5 Modify any concept to fit your needs.
6 Let the children handle the movable and portable equipment.
7 Plan your course of action.

What I see within this project is the progressive opportunity to develop self-direction, independence, and creativity among the children. Ultimately we all would hope this returns full-circle to where you people are now. That is, interdependence and the desire and willingness to help others. Whatever we decide to do and however we plan to carry it through, we must always return to one cornerstone--PLAY. No matter our approach, we must always use as our yardstick (1) the play of children in kindergarten through third grade, and (2) we want the play to continue over time rather than terminate when the newness or novelty of the setting wears off.

I hope you and the PTA committee will accept the challenge I present to you in this letter.

Sincerely,

Jack Hutslar

Jack Hutslar, Ph. D.
Assistant Professor

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Herkowitz, Jacqueline and Leigh F. Kieffer. "Structuring the Movement Environment for Preschool Children." Quest, XXIV (Summer, 1975), 72-79.

Lambert, Jack as told to Jenny Pearson. Adventure Playgrounds. London: Jonathan Cape, 1974.

Lederman, Alfred and Alfred Trachsel. Creative Playgrounds and Recreation Centers. Revised edition. New York: Praeger, 1968.